

# EXTRA-RATIONAL

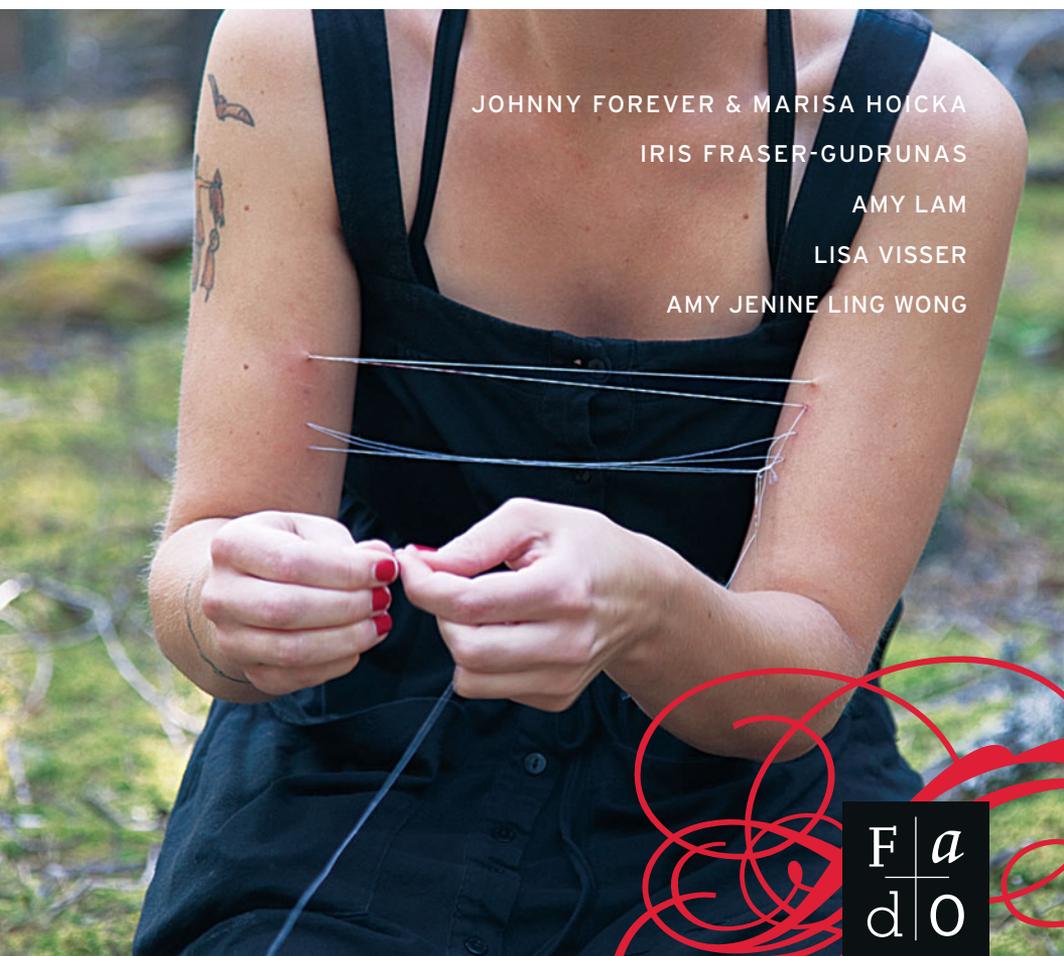
JOHNNY FOREVER & MARISA HOICKA

IRIS FRASER-GUDRUNAS

AMY LAM

LISA VISSER

AMY JENINE LING WONG



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## EXTRA-RATIONAL

### AFTERNOON PROGRAM 12 - 6 PM

Trust My Gut: A Drag Opera Surgery  
JOHNNY FOREVER & MARISA HOICKA

Pop Tarot  
IRIS FRASER-GUDRUNAS

### EVENING PROGRAM 7 PM

Trust My Gut: A Drag Opera Surgery  
JOHNNY FOREVER & MARISA HOICKA

NANA  
AMY JENINE LING WONG

We Don't Love Each Other  
LISA VISSER

Droozle Help Me  
AMY LAM

Pop Tarot  
IRIS FRASER-GUDRUNAS



LISA KISS DESIGN

## EXTRA-RATIONAL

Curated by Gale Allen

Saturday 12 March 2011  
XPACE Cultural Centre  
58 Ossington Avenue, Toronto

FADO Performance Art Centre's Emerging Artists Series was created to provide an on-going professional venue for emerging artists to develop and present a performance piece by working within a curatorial framework set out by an emerging curator. FADO's intention with this series is to nurture new work and ideas, provide direction and mentorship to both the artists and the curator, and to showcase the work of Toronto's (and beyond) newest performance artists.

[www.performanceart.ca](http://www.performanceart.ca)



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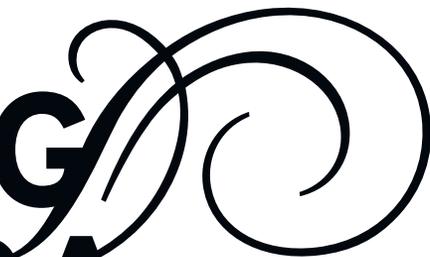


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# BEING EXTRA- RATIONAL



GALE ALLEN

*Extra-Rational* is a series of performances by emerging Canadian artists that embrace the aesthetics of popular culture and seek to recuperate/ utilize these “low brow” processes of production and cognition. Popular culture, like the carnal senses, is often relegated to (and contains) the realm of the uncivilized and unmentionable functions of the body. Artists who intentionally occupy the position of the lowly other—the unmentionable—directly challenge the rubric upon which those in a position of authority are reliant. It’s for this reason that scholar Robert Allen, whose research includes popular movements such as the early feminized burlesque contends that, “What those in power regard as trivial and only play can, under certain circumstances, become serious and violent.”<sup>1</sup>

The performances in *Extra-Rational* utilize a variety of processes present in popular culture aligning these artists with a rich history of “low brow” popular movements that have often used the position of the uncivilized entertainer as a platform from which to advocate for emancipation and gender equality. The tactics used by the artists exceed what is popularly defined as rational, using illogical and irrational methods to challenge traditionally rational values in education, criticism and aesthetics.

Referencing sketch comedy and stand-up, Amy Lam’s performance of “high concept” comedy alludes to the history of women in comedy from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early feminized burlesque performers often evoked the use of humor, mixed with prettiness and cross-dressing, as a method to speak their minds on contemporary issues. In the performance *Droozle Help Me*, Lam, like the early burlesque performers of the 1920s, exposes the illusionistic conventions of her character by creating deliberate incongruities between herself as a performer<sup>2</sup>, the character and the audience. Female performers who make use of humor and play “themselves” on the stage have faced considerable “othering”, feminized burlesque was eventually relegated to the level of striptease<sup>3</sup> and contemporary female stand-up comics were only permitted to take the stage in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary drag performance also references the history of feminized burlesque, and like these performers, transgendered performers of today challenge traditional notions of gender while simultaneously making use of popular culture and humor. The work of Johnny Forever and Marisa Hoicka bridges so called “low-brow” queer cabaret traditions with gallery performance and fibre arts to expose the personal narratives of the artists’ drag characters Mini Maul and Uncle Wink. Framed by a larger than life crocheted replica of a YouTube window, Maul and Wink perform a grotesque operation that references the televised surgeries of Orlan and broadcast the personal drama, and the innards, of Wink to the world. This act of surgery utilizes tools associated with traditional fibre practices: a crochet hook, sewing needles

and tailor scissors. Wink's insides are carefully crafted into fibre sculptures. Forever and Hoicka have also incorporated lip-syncing routines, a trope of traditional drag, into the piece; at the whim of the viewers Maul and Wink will perform lip-sync duets to songs selected by members of the audience.

The faux surgical procedures of Forever and Hoicka are contrasted by the very real penetration of flesh in Lisa Visser's *We Don't Love Each Other*. In this piece the artist challenges her body, referencing the history of body/performance artists such as Marina Abramović and Gina Pane, as she methodically consumes large quantities of hard alcohol while sewing her left arm to her right arm. Visser's work makes use of the abject body and pain. Her piece demonstrates the intersection of historical performance works (such as Chris Burden) with contemporary entertainment. Actions like the ones she performs are now commonplace on YouTube and masculine stunt-based reality television shows (and movies) such as *Jack Ass*. The consumption of alcohol and the use of humor (she is after all, drunk and bloody) contrast her contemplative sewing actions. Visser's work is easily labeled as shocking, a word that is often used to describe visceral/abject artworks, demoting them to a lower, less intellectual status, and accusing them of neglecting the rigors of dialogue. But Visser's work is anything but shocking, she is presenting the audience with a series of authentic actions that remove the mediation of the screen, forcing the audience to confront a live version of images that are often consumed at home.

Like Visser, Iris Fraser-Gudrunas explores the uneasiness of that which "exceeds representation."<sup>5</sup> Using bottles of pop in place of a Tarot deck, Fraser-Gudrunas' performance entitled *Pop Tarot* combines divination, intuition and the artist's semiotic knowledge of pop bottles to answer life questions posed by audience members. Intuition is often trivialized as new age, flakey and unintelligent. Fraser-Gudrunas challenges these notions with her observant reading of consumer objects. She carefully evaluates the packaging, bottle design, listed ingredients, and the liquid contained within

the bottle providing insightful comments. Consumed for amusement but rarely taken seriously, psychics, intuitives and diviners continue to be "othered" in contemporary society. Similar to the women of the early burlesque and stand-up comedy, psychics have often used their abilities to speak their minds. Members of the Spiritualism movement (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, North America) often used their psychic abilities to channel messages from the beyond in support of the emancipation of women.<sup>6</sup>

*NANA* by Amy Jenine Ling Wong further investigates out-of-body identity, but instead of considering the astral plane, Wong's work considers the creation of "bodiless internet identities"<sup>7</sup>, the rise of the Internet meme and Internet celebrity. The Internet meme is an image, idea, video or phrase that illogically spreads virally from individual to individual and the meme often contains a reference to another meme. An example of a popular Internet meme is the lolcats (a lolcat meme is composed of an image of a cat paired with a humorous phrase that often references a different meme). Wong feels that her generation's obsession with new and unique forms of self-generated-online media has resulted in a repetitive cycle of indistinguishable images and videos. In her performance Wong adds to the large body of Internet videos various clichéd characters present on YouTube and Vimeo, however *NANA* is live and Wong plays herself. In an act of duration she mirrors her video image and continually licks honey off the monitor while on display in the gallery's street level window.

#### NOTES

- 1 Allen, Robert Clyde. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 35.
- 2 The early feminized burlesque often made use of the "mock rehearsal" as a premise. (Allen, 1991:105)
- 3 Allen, Robert Clyde. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 16.
- 4 Lavin, Suzanne, *Women and Comedy in Solo Performance: Phyllis Diller, Lily Tomlin and Roseanne* (*Studies in American Popular History and Culture*). (Routledge, 2004) 2.
- 5 Fisher, Jennifer, *Technologies of Intuition*. (YYZ Books, 2007) 13.
- 6 Fisher, Jennifer. *Technologies of Intuition*. (YYZ Books, 2007) 15-17.
- 7 Fisher, Jennifer. *Technologies of Intuition*. (YYZ Books, 2007) 16.

# POP TAROT



Insight mixes with consumerism and pop culture to create intuitive knowledge in Iris Fraser-Gudrunas' performance *Pop Tarot*. Fraser-Gudrunas divines the future and answers the viewers' life questions using a collection of strange and unfamiliar pop bottles. Viewers are invited to blindly select four beverage bottles/cans from a large inventory, stored in a nondescript cardboard box. The bottles represent the past, present, future and soul of the participant. Carefully analyzing the qualities of the consumer packaging, the clarity of the labels, the visual nature of the liquid and the list of ingredients, Fraser-Gudrunas provides the viewers with insight and guidance.

**IRIS FRASER-GUDRUNAS**

# TRUST MY GUT: A DRAG OPERA SURGERY

*Trust My Gut: A Drag Opera Surgery*, performed by Mini Maul and Uncle Wink (two characters selected from the drag oeuvre of Johnny Forever and Marisa Hoicka) dramatizes the recent merging of home and stage on social networking sites such as YouTube, Vimeo and Facebook. This eight-hour durational installation references Orland's televised performance art surgeries of the early 90s. Framed by a crochet replica of a YouTube window, Mini Maul performs surgery on Uncle Wink with a pair of tailor's scissors, crochet hooks and a sewing needle. While splayed open Uncle Wink remains gloriously conscious as Mini Maul crafts his innards, a mass of yarn and fabric, into outrageous sculptural forms that rise from his belly and spill onto the floor. From time to time patient and doctor break into lip-synced duets chosen by audience members from a nearby laptop.

**JOHNNY FOREVER & MARISA HOICKA**





# DROOZLE HELP ME

*Droozle Help Me*, a performance that references the comedy sketch genre, makes use of humour and high concept comedy. In this performative lecture Amy Lam plays a character named Droozle who is looking for a new roommate. She uses inappropriate props and costumes in her attempt to be persuasive. As the performance unfolds Lam creates deliberate incongruence between herself as performer, the goals of her character and the audience's reactions. Lam's work continues the dialogue started by female comics of the 1950s who used intelligence, wit and a fair amount of acting out to comment on contemporary culture.

**AMY LAM**





# WE DON'T LOVE EACH OTHER



*We Don't Love Each Other* is a reflexive performance that investigates the female object body. Composed of a series of simple actions and objects, Visser drinks a copious amount of hard alcohol while attaching her left arm to her right with the use of a sewing needle and thread. The performance combines contrasting images of harm and repair: what appears to be harmful (sewing) is conceptually approached as repair—or reclamation—of not just a body but everything that is given and compromised in a relationship. And the repair—drinking and drowning one's feelings in alcohol—is actually harmful. The piece is implicitly humorous; the artist is drunk, awkward and bloody, while the audience is compelled to watch seriously and earnestly while the hour-long performance unfolds.

**LISA VISSER**



# NANA



NANA is a four-hour durational performance that references narcissism in youth culture and questions the rise of the self-made Internet celebrity. Occupying the gallery's street level window, Wong confronts viewers caught off guard with the image of her slowly licking a honey-encrusted monitor. Under the honey, the monitor flickers with a mirror image of herself performing various actions. NANA is an extension of Wong's online Vimeo library, in which she plays a wide variety of characters including: a young girl offering advice on the application of *Avatar* make-up, a sullen woman smoking a cigarette while explaining her attempts to replicate the "real community" of the 60s on Facebook and a teenager aimlessly video blogging about piercing her nose.

**AMY JENINE LING WONG**

**GALE ALLEN** is a visual artist currently based in Toronto, Canada. Allen's practice investigates the aesthetics of revolt present in popular culture. Recent projects include *You Call Yourself A Lady* (Hysteria Festival, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre), *All I Ever Wanted* (Hatch, Harbourfront Centre), and *Must be the colours and the kids that keep me alive* (Pleasure Dome).

**JOHNNY FOREVER** (a.k.a. Johnny Nawracaj) is a Polish-born transgendered artist currently based in Montréal, Canada. Forever's growing body of work includes durational/installation performance as well as staged pieces, which weave surrealist narrative through the use of song, video, dance/gesture and drag costuming. Forever is co-creator of Montréal's Cabaret Faux Pas, a D.I.Y. queer cabaret featuring emerging performance, burlesque, and drag artists in co-operation with such venues as Café Cléopatre.

**IRIS FRASER-GUDRUNAS** is a visual artist, curator and filmmaker currently based in Toronto, Canada. Fraser-Gudrunas' work investigates candid reactions ranging from apprehension to abandon. Fraser has exhibited and curated shows with many groups in Toronto including PleasureDome, Film Fort, Blocks Recording Club, Don Blanche Residency, Artscape Gibraltar Point Residency, Images Festival, Hart House Film Club, Toronto Public Library, Splice This!, and various independent events. Her first feature film will be released in 2011.

**MARISA HOICKA** is an emerging artist who divides her time between Montréal and Toronto, Canada. Hoicka works in a variety of mediums including painting, performance, fibre and breakdancing. She has exhibited her work in galleries such as Gallery 401 and Art Mur. Hoicka holds a BFA in Studio Arts from Concordia University.

**AMY LAM** was born in Hong Kong and lives and works in Toronto, Canada. Lam is half of the high-concept comedy duo Life of a Craphead. Life of a Craphead make entertainment events in theatres, pedestrian crossings, restaurants, and regularly perform in comedy clubs. Lam has completed residencies in the United States and the Netherlands and has presented work at venues such as Gallery TPW, the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre, and Double Double Land. She is President of the Board of Directors of Art Metropole. [www.amylamwebsite.com](http://www.amylamwebsite.com)

**LISA VISSER** is a visual artist and curator currently based in Toronto, Canada. Visser's work focuses on sculpture, performance, textiles and print-making. She holds a BFA from Queens University and is currently enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Master's of Art, Media and Design at OCAD University. [www.lisavisser.org](http://www.lisavisser.org)

**AMY JENINE LING WONG** is a video and performance artist based in Toronto, Canada. Wong's work investigates how intimacy is translated through internet meme and online youth culture. Wong has performed and exhibited at venues such as Whippersnapper Gallery, JMB Gallery, White House, XPACE and Red Head Gallery. She is currently completing her BA in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto. [www.amyjenine.com](http://www.amyjenine.com)



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